Addressing Food Allergies in Schools

TO BAN OR NOT TO BAN?

School Boards | Superintendents | Principals | Nurses | Nutrition Services

The National Peanut Board is a farmer-funded agricultural promotion group that supports marketing and research of America’s favorite nut. Affordable, nutritious and convenient, peanuts and peanut butter have been part of school feeding programs and American homes for decades. Since its founding in 2001, the Board has allocated more than $25 million to food allergy research, outreach and education to help find solutions.

Learn more at: peanutallergyfacts.org

The following is a selection of information contained in the CDC’s 2013 Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools that suggest responsibilities for all members of the school community. Please review the complete CDC guidelines at: CDC.gov/HealthyYouth/FoodAllergies

The National Peanut Board

nationalpeanutboard.org

HER E ARE TH E FAC TS ABOUT SEVERITY, PREVALENCE AND R ISK OF PEANUT ALLERGY:

- More than 98 percent of children are not allergic to peanuts. Egg and milk allergies are more common among children and can be as serious.
- There is no fail-safe way to prevent any food allergen from inadvertently entering a school. In fact, food bans can create a false sense of security.
- With new guidelines from the National Institute of Health for introducing peanuts to infants, significantly fewer students may have a peanut allergy in the future.

RESEARCH SHOWS REDUCED RISK OF ANAPHYLAXIS DUE TO CASUAL CONTACT

- A study of 30 peanut-allergic children who smelled peanut butter for 10 minutes resulted in zero reactions. Skin contact in this study also resulted in zero life-threatening reactions; redness and irritation occurred for some where the peanut butter touched the skin.
- Further research supports that people with peanut allergies are highly unlikely to have serious reactions as the result of casual contact, and that simple soap and water cleans surfaces and hands of peanut proteins.
- It is important that allergic individuals continue to use caution to avoid accidental ingestion and cross-contact with allergens. Schools and communities should use an evidence-based approach to creating policies to protect allergic individuals.

Studies show that:

- There is no fail-safe way to prevent any food allergen from inadvertently entering a school.
- Food bans can create a false sense of security.
- New guidelines from the National Institute of Health for introducing peanuts to infants may significantly reduce peanut allergies in the future.
- Research supports that people with peanut allergies are highly unlikely to have serious reactions as the result of casual contact.
- Simple soap and water cleans surfaces and hands of peanut proteins.

Schools are working to balance the safety of food-allergic students with others’ access to nutritious and affordable foods.

Well-regarded research and experts, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), encourage comprehensive food allergy management programs as the best solution. Moreover, a survey of 816 parents of 5-12 year olds showed that the vast majority do not support school-wide bans, including 78 percent of parents with a nut-allergic child.

Many schools and districts across the country have implemented comprehensive, evidenced-based approaches to food allergy management, recommended by the experts. For case studies, visit: peanutallergyfacts.org

Notes:

7. The following is a selection of information contained in the CDC’s 2013 Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools that suggest responsibilities for all members of the school community. Please review the complete CDC guidelines at: CDC.gov/HealthyYouth/FoodAllergies

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Your district or school may be grappling with the best way to protect students with food allergies. The 2013 Voluntary Guidelines from the CDC and others do not endorse school-wide food bans as a way to address allergies.

THE CDC SUGGESTS SCHOOL POLICYMAKERS AND ADMINISTRATORS:

Set the direction for the district’s coordinated approach to managing food allergies. Develop and implement policies with a variety of school staff, from nurses and teachers to bus drivers and custodians.

Prepare for emergencies. Ensure that food allergy reactions are part of the district’s emergency planning.

Support professional development on food allergies for staff. Allocate resources and time for food allergy training.

Educate students and family members about food allergies. Incorporate food allergy information in student curriculum.

Create and maintain a school environment that contributes to student health and well-being. Ensure that policies address food in classrooms, afterschool programs and other situations.

SCHOOL NURSES

School nurses are uniquely charged with the health and well-being of students. Managing complex conditions, including food allergies, can be challenging. However, the 2013 Voluntary Guidelines from the CDC and others do not endorse school-wide food bans as a way to address allergies.

THE CDC SUGGESTS REGISTERED SCHOOL NURSES:

» Participate in the school’s coordinated approach to managing food allergies. Lead or assist with planning and implementation.

» Supervise the daily management of food allergies for individual students. Identify those students and share information with staff in accordance with federal and state laws.

» Prepare for and respond to emergencies. Develop an alternate plan if you are unavailable and ensure that epinephrine is accessible at all times.

» Help provide professional development for staff and education for students and parents. Know best practices and help students with food allergies develop self-management skills.

» Create and maintain a school environment that contributes to student health and well-being. Work with school counselors to provide emotional support to students with food allergies.

SCHOOL NUTRITION SERVICES STAFF

As the gatekeepers to food and nutrition, the school nutrition services staff have the responsibility to ensure that the food served is both nutritious and safe. While some may seek to remove potential allergens from menus, this is not recommended by the 2013 Voluntary Guidelines from the CDC as a way to address allergies.

IN ADDITION TO HELPING PLAN AND IMPLEMENT THE SCHOOL’S FOOD ALLERGEN MANAGEMENT PROGRAM, THE CDC SUGGESTS SCHOOL NUTRITION SERVICES STAFF:

» Help with the daily management of food allergies for individual students. Understand each child’s emergency care plan and get medical orders to accommodate affected students.

» Prepare for and respond to food allergy emergencies. Make ECPs detailed and direct, ensure epinephrine is available and that food service staff can respond to and implement an ECP.

» Participate in professional development. Complete training that focuses on food allergy signs and symptoms, ways to reduce or prevent reactions in the cafeteria, among others.

SCHOOL NUTRITION SERVICES STAFF, FOOD SERVICE MANAGERS AND STAFF CAN ALSO:

» Provide food allergy education to students and parents. Share the message through school communications and encourage parents of students with food allergies to share experiences.

» Create and maintain a school environment that contributes to student health and well-being to promote a supportive school nutrition and food service experience.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: SCHOOL POLICYMAKERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

» National Association of School Boards, Safe at School and Ready to Learn: www.NSBA.org/Resource-Library/Board-Leadership

SCHOOL NURSES

» National Association of School Nurses, NASN Toolkit: Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis: www.NASN.org/ToolsResources/FoodAllergyandAnaphylaxis

SCHOOL NUTRITION AND FOOD SERVICE

» Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Food Allergies: Online Certificate of Training: www.EatRight.org/CFD/OnlineSchool

» School Nutrition Association, Food Allergy Resource Center: schoolnutrition.org

» School Nutrition Foundation, School Nutrition University: Food Allergy Management: www.SNUUniversity.org/Allergy.html

FOR MANAGING FOOD ALLERGIES IN SCHOOLS

» Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE), Resources for Schools: www.FoodAllergy.org/Resources/Schools